Anisa Redmond

Cultural Anthropology 206

Ethnogrophy and Ethnology

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Intro:

Jetty Island, the hidden treasure of Everett, Washington is now a favorite of mine to visit. I had heard about it two years ago only to make it up there twice this summer already. It is mysterious at first to hear there is an island off of Everett’s coast. Everett that I don’t care much for and never have even having been born and raised here in the Puget Sound area of Washington. With so much intrigue surrounding the tale of Jetty, it seems to most people to good to be true, urban folklore. Maybe that is what staves people off the island. That’s not to say that Jetty is without its raving fans. And I am by no means writing this Ethnogrophy to spread the good gospel of this hidden in plain view spot. There is going to remain a haze before your eyes and will not part except under your extreme will to make the trek to Jetty and all it has to offer. As long as to you an offering is close to nothing but what nature intended.

Methodology:

Friends of mine that also happen to be neighbors all got together and decided to caravan up to Jetty a few days from then. It was hot as hoped, lunches and food to share was packed, coolers stocked with icy drinks, towels, blankets, gobs of sunscreen and swimming paraphernalia for kids and adults alike. We showed up with no reservation and unaware that one was optional. We then spent quite a while, 3 hours to be exact, waiting for a turn on the walk-on ferry. We collected passes for all 23 of us and waited in the grass. We passed the time with discussion, entertainment by the children, snacks and lounging watching the sea lions in the marina. I had luckily brought a notebook and pen my first time there which I do for myself and the kids to doodle and sketch or write observations.

At a point about 2 hours in to waiting I gave away some earlier passes that I was holding on to in hopes of eventually collecting enough from the ferry staff as they randomly gave away passes as people gave up and went home. When I saw an older couple looking desperate I asked them if they wanted my 1:30 passes and they happily accepted but only needed one. Another woman of about 55 overheard me and scolded and ranted at me telling me that that the ferry operated in some fashion that was not entirely true. I told her “Actually, that’s not how it works.” I could not get a word in edgewise and she stomped of frantically, sweat dripping off her face. She had found it necessary to complain to the ferry booth and an announcement was made immediately to only hand over extra passes to staff so that they may distribute them accordingly. I was under the effects of her stampede for about 7 minutes and then shrugged it off never to be mentioned until now. I guess the 90 degree heat was a lot for some people to handle and may be why passes kept becoming available as people decided not to wait.

After turning to change the subject with some of my friends, my class in Anthropology came up and sparks flew when I realized that with my pen and paper in my backpack I would have everything I needed and all the time I needed to observe and take notes for my assignment. I realized that it would be interesting enough to study a place that was right under local’s noses but still so elusive. The island is kept close to pristine with low foot traffic, limited daily guests and seasonal breaks. There are only two trashcans near the islands ferry dock and a trash monster painted to look like the Loch Ness monster where trash from the week before is hung to remind guests the importance of *you haul it in, you haul it out.* I like that bald head eagles frequent the island and the water is bathwater warm and shallow for a mile across and out. It is special in that it is kept natural and protected by a small staff that believes in what they do. I seek out places that are esteemed for their preservation and I seek warm waters. This is a well loved island of leisure and is respected because locals hold it dear. There is a donation for the ferry. Two dollars for adults and one for a child are asked but not mandatory and can be discreetly dropped in a box upon departure or arrival.

Data Presentation and Analysis:

It is my second time to Jetty Island and this time my friend made reservations two weeks in advance for 43 people. You can make reservations for twelve or more people with notice. The ferry holds a capacity of 80 persons but it appeared that with all the gear one hauls over for the day the count is always lower more like 55 on this very day. It was not so hot as before in last July but it was warm, sunny, and muggy and all was right with the world because I had my eye on everything I could manage for my assignment. My own crew was elated to be heading up there again and we brought a friend that had never been. She was observing closely the sea lions and the ferry staff, not asking any questions. Those that had been before were giving a description of this and that, trying to excite the newcomer. We were late for our ferry because of an accident in our home town of Bothell near the freeway entrance. We were able to make the ferry for half hour later. There was a sound over the megaphone giving instruction to line up for the ferry. When the announcer stated that there was only passes left for the 5:15 and the 5:30 returning ferries I saw two twin girls ages 13 or so exclaim worriedly to their mother that that wouldn’t work and she said no several times as if she was nervous about something. I plan to stay as long and as late as possible. When I go to Jetty I don’t make other plans for anything else that day. I knew though that something was amiss. I am not sure if it was the amount of people I saw on the island compared to how many ferries were left for the day but sure enough, the staff ended up adding two more return ferries to the end of the day.

Everyone shuffles their gear down the metal grate toward the ferry. The personnel are very careful to only let you board if you have a pass, no exceptions. The man and woman in charge were holding together very well even though they were just now catching up with the schedule. I could hear them from my seat which was above, an open seating area along the whole top of the ferry. The captain was a woman in her twenty’s that had the curliest near black hair I had seen since high school. She was apparently still becoming familiar with this particular boat. Everyone on top of the ferry was smiling and observing the water and people around them. Someone else from our neighborhood shows up top the ferry with us and sits. It’s a mother and her daughter. She opens her lunch pack and says “I am hungry now, who wants string cheese?” We all laugh because she did the same thing last month in the same spot on the ferry. During the seven minute ride the captains voice comes over the loud speaker welcoming everyone to Jetty Island and reminding us to clean up after ourselves and that we enjoy our visit. We were also reminded to pick up our return passes as soon as we docked the island. Return passes are first come first serve. There are different time slots open for ferries back to the mainland and once a slot is taken you must choose differently. Everyone is so anxious to find a place on the two mile long stretch of beach to spend their day yet even parents with children are patient and wait for those sitting closest to the skinny spiral staircase leading to the lower deck where you can disembark. We are welcomed by more staff and directed up a plank and to a bridge passed the only restroom on the island that I know of. The bridge leads over the salty lagoon where we see baby seagulls. The kids from my neighborhood squeal and stop to gawk over the fuzzy waddlers. My friends below me and I agreed we wanted to find a quiet place further north to camp in the sand for the day but as soon as we get to the west side of the island to the beach the rest of our group is camped in, it appears the busiest section of the island where not only did they have already a beautiful view but the shortest walk back to the ferry. For the kids sake we camped with the rest of the families, at least for now. No one wants to be the Grinch. Some people had settled in under their umbrellas. Others were sun basking. The children were immediately in the water and sand. Everyone had their little nook laid down with blanket, food and floaties. Adults were smiling and chatting and interacting with the children intermittently as needed. Children were digging holes and filling them with water from buckets. The tide was going to be fully in at 2pm so we had close access to the water already. One of my neighbors was perfectly posed under her umbrella in a chair knitting while her four children played. She begins to tell me that she had unraveled an old wool navy sweater and knitted it into a cardigan for herself. She tells me that she is knitting while she can get it in and that her sanity depends on it. I sat back down and ate something for the first time that day then applied my sunscreen and dove into the inflation of my new floating lounge chair. However many breaths later I was done my daughter swings by just in time to spirit it away. Soon enough she is back for her skim board but before I can worn her that the tide had to be going out for her to use it up north she fell on her second try. Skim boarding takes place daily in the summer on Jetty. It looks like a mini surf board and is a lot thinner. It is used on the shore where the water layers over itself several times as the tide goes out. The board is thrown parallel to the shore line as your running alongside and as soon as you catch up with the board you jump on it with momentum build the aim is to skim the surface of the water and I saw many tricks performed by a few young boys around the age of eighteen. They would call out some of their favorite sayings as they failed or conquered the maneuver. My friend and I decided to go for a walk. We walked and talked about how much we appreciated the simplicity of the island and the low profile of the staff. As we approached the lagoon we spotted a bald head eagle in one of the deciduous trees and watched it until it flew away. On the way back we stopped by the little shack near the ferry dock and bathrooms to check it out. They offered t-shirts, water and some pamphlets. Everything was unmanned and trust based. We wrote in the wildlife sightings book the date and time and creature that we saw. The group was so happy to be crowded together and sharing the experience.

It was time to get in the water and observe. The water at Jetty is shallow. So shallow that you could walk a half a mile or more out and still not be up to your ribcage. This went all the way up and down the two mile length of Jetty as well. I grabbed my floaty and went out till it was up to my knees. There was a seaweed fight. There is a fine seaweed that floats around at this tide and kids were collecting it to form wads of green weeds to throw at friends. It was war when one boy got sneaky and started attacking from behind. He was so happy with himself that you couldn’t help but get him back which prompted another attack even if you tried to flee the scene. After twenty minutes I decided to paddle up beach to where my sister was camped out, where it was a lot less populated and the skim boarding would take place. As I paddled up I saw families had been drawn to the seasonally permanent beached tree with its massive roots sticking up into the air. People are constantly moving the big drift logs around to build forts with and without roofs. This tree was just barely out of reach of high tide and had been made a little fortress of privacy that could only be accessed from the water at the time I passed by. It was triangle shaped and no doubt had been staked out and built before the tide came in all the way. I think that next time I will do the same for the kids. I see someone being buried up to their neck in a sandy mound by maybe siblings or friends. My sister and her friend are perched up on the sandy ledge between the waterline and the lagoon. There is a lot more space and privacy up in the north areas. This is also the spot to be for kite surfing and skim boarding. Kite surfers wait for the perfect conditions. You can see them from far away with their gear and kite packed into a huge backpack and their foot board underarm. They keep to themselves in small groups. I have only seen men or boys kiting, no girls yet. There is some groups that have same age girls in the group, usually one or two and they are doing their own thing, sunbathing, reading and watching the kite surfers. I walk up to my sister and decide to bring my things over from the big group. I brought over the small group I arrived with. We all wanted more space, less people clutter. There is an obvious draw to be camped out near the ferry especially if you are not comfortable walking further or have a lot to carry. And in our neighborhood’s case, the first to arrive sets the camp and the rest follow.

I had it decided from the first time I visited that next time I would venture out to set up in the north end even though I would have to drag a cooler and pack and floaties in the heat. This is a place you can be in the water all day and not ever chill. People appear to be relaxed in the natural setting and carefree that the water is warm and shallow for their children to enjoy. It is perfect for the eagles and the kite surfers alike. It is a little slice of heaven just north of the naval station and Scuttlebutt brewery but you would never know it and you see nothing but the islands across the way from the Jetty shore. It was time to pack it in for the 5:30 ferry back to the mainland. I want to stay and camp the night, it only seems natural. My friends agree deeply. Everyone is sun kissed and relaxed speechless. No one is restless or loud. Everyone seems to have been taken in by the surroundings. The ride back is nearly silent. Only mothers directing their toddlers.

Ethnology (cross-cultural comparison):

I cross examined Jake Hess’s report as he was the only Spokane student that was under the same category as I was (*play*). He had been to Hawaii and had found differences that I did not. He noted that no beach he visited during his trip had one single elderly person strolling. I noted several elderly and even noticed a van in the parking lot for a senior home. They of course had gone over very early and only for a few hours, before the heat of the day spiked. He noticed more people sunbathed than chose water play where as I had found most people were in the water swimming and playing or in the sand, creatively constructing temporary art and shelters of drift wood.

I believe it is possible that the elderly stay close to the air conditioning and bathrooms as they are less tolerant to the heat than the younger generations. Jake had taken note of this and reflected that knowledge. Jake noted there was groups that came to particular beaches to BBQ. There is not a lot of barbequing done at Jetty. I have only ever seen one pit and never being used. I am now curious as to why it is never scoped out and snatched up like a commodity.

Jakes research was compiled over a four day period where mine was in one whole day from 12 noon too 5:30pm. It was a muggy day and I know Hawaii is famous for their muggy environment so I will presume for now that it was muggy for Jake’s research.

Jake also recognized many different languages from all the tourists that Hawaii hosts. I did not overhear anything but English. However, there were people of different nationalities. Jetty Island is a well kept secret even from nearby towns and therefore is full of locals with a few newbie’s in tow. Hawaii on the other hand is a main attraction for those wanting a tropical experience on American soil.

Conclusion:

There is much more to know about Jetty. It is rumored to be almost entirely underwater in the winter months and by looking at the terrain I would believe so but need further research and questioning. This could be how it maintains its beautiful shape. There are several activities that Jetty Island hosts. One is coming up later in this month. It is an annual event treasure hunt and they hide these beautiful blue-green glass floaters so well around the island that ones from the previous years have been found long after the hunt. I am making plans to attend this event out of curiosity but I know myself and I enjoy escaping into the earthy activity of floating in the warm water and sunning in the fine sand.